

***National Park Service***  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Denali National Park and Preserve**  
**Alaska**



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**Finding of No Significant Impact**  
**Two New Trails in the Park Entrance Area**

July 2005

Recommended: \_\_\_\_\_  
Superintendent  
Denali National Park and Preserve  
Date

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Director, Alaska  
Date

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

### **Two New Trails in the Park Entrance**

#### **Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska July 2005**

The National Park Service (NPS) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) that evaluates a proposal to construct two new trails in the entrance area of Denali National Park and Preserve. The McKinley Station Trail will make a pedestrian connection between the Riley Creek Campground/Mercantile area and the new Denali Visitor Center. The Meadow View trail will create a new loop trail by making a hillside connection between the Rock Creek Trail and the Roadside Path.

The NPS has selected **Alternative 3 – A Longer McKinley Station Trail**. A 1640 foot-long Meadow View Trail and a 3500 foot-long McKinley Station Trail will be constructed in the entrance area. This alternative will be implemented with mitigation measures described in the EA.

Attachment A provides details about public comment received on the EA. The NPS received one substantive comment on the EA and has adjusted the cultural resources mitigation measures. No additional information has been added to the EA.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

The EA evaluated three alternatives: Alternative 1 – the No-Action Alternative (Environmentally Preferred Alternative); Alternative 2 – A Shorter McKinley Station Trail (NPS Preferred Alternative); Alternative 3- A Longer McKinley Station Trail. The Meadow View Trail was an action common to both Alternatives 2 and 3.

### **Alternative 1: No Action (the Environmentally Preferred Alternative)**

Under this alternative, there would be no new trails constructed in the park entrance area.

### **Alternative 2: A Shorter McKinley Station Trail in the Park Entrance Area (the NPS Preferred Alternative)**

Under this alternative a trail would be constructed from the Denali Visitor Center through the former Morino Campground, descend upstream and then turn downstream to run high under the Alaska Railroad bridge over Riley Creek and end near the Old Morino Roadhouse ruins. At the roadhouse ruins it would connect to an existing trail being upgraded that goes to the Riley Creek Campground/Mercantile area. Approximately 100 feet of the trail would be located on the edge of a small pocket of palustrine wetlands. As part of this proposal a new trail leading down to the upper floodplain level near the Riley Creek railroad trestle would also be constructed and start

near the Old Morino Roadhouse ruins. These new trails would total 2,500 feet of length and be constructed 3-6 feet wide. The trails would be designed to meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards for compaction and gradient. Where the trail skirts the fill slope of the Alaska Railroad tracks (north of the trestle), the trail would be constructed by building a retaining wall on the lower side of the trail and filling to create the trail tread. There would not be any disturbance to the Alaska Railroad fill slope.

A 24 foot long, six foot wide covered walkway would be constructed underneath the Alaska Railroad trestle to protect pedestrians from falling debris from the tracks above.

A Meadow View Trail would be constructed between the Rock Creek Trail and the Roadside Path at approximately 1950 feet elevation - approximately 200 feet above the new visitor center. It would be 1640 feet long, two feet wide, and surfaced with compacted D-1 material.

### **Alternative 3: A Longer McKinley Station Trail in the Park Entrance Area (the Alternative SELECTED FOR IMPLEMENTATION)**

Under this alternative, the NPS will construct a trail from the Denali Visitor Center through the former Morino Campground and descend upstream on Hines Creek, run downstream to and along the floodplain of Hines Creek and run low under the Alaska Railroad trestle over Riley Creek and end near the Old Morino Roadhouse ruins. At the roadhouse ruins it would connect to an existing trail being upgraded that goes to the Riley Creek Campground area. This new trail would be 3500 feet long, from 3-6 feet wide, and it would be gravel-surfaced and designed to Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility standards for gradient and compaction. About 100 feet of the trail would be elevated one foot above the floodplain on a boardwalk where a bedrock ridge pinches close to the creek channel and where water flow is likely each summer. A 24 foot long, six foot wide covered walkway would be constructed underneath the Alaska Railroad trestle to protect pedestrians from falling debris from the tracks above.

A Meadow View Trail would be constructed between the Rock Creek Trail and the Roadside Path at approximately 1950 feet elevation - approximately 200 feet above the new visitor center. It would be 1640 feet long, two feet wide, and surfaced with compacted D-1 material.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

A 30-day public review and comment period of the EA was conducted from June 6, 2005 to July 6, 2005. The press release announcing the EA was mailed to local media, agencies and groups, and the EA was posted on the park's web site, the national NPS public comment website, and was delivered to 3 organizations and State of Alaska. Three comments were received on the EA representing the opinions of the State of Alaska and two private individuals. The State and one commentator supported the construction of the two new trails without specifying a preference for either action alternative. The other commentator requested more cultural resource investigation before proceeding with construction of the McKinley Station Trail.

The public comment received did not change the conclusions in the EA about the environmental effects of the action, but did suggest additional mitigation measures which have been included in the decision.

## **DECISION**

The National Park Service's decision is to select Alternative 3 to construct the Longer McKinley Station Trail and the Meadow View Trail in the park entrance area, along with the mitigation measures specified herein.

### **Mitigation and Monitoring**

Mitigation measures are specific actions that when implemented reduce impacts, protect park resources, and protect visitors. The following mitigation will be implemented with the project and were assumed in the analysis of effects.

**Vegetation.** Vegetation mats that need to be moved from the project area would be saved and moved to areas around the visitor center site that need revegetation. Areas disturbed but not part of the finished trails would be restored with native vegetation. Periodic surveys would be conducted to determine the presence of exotic plants.

**Water Resources and Wetlands.** At least one rest site along the trail would be devoted to interpreting wetland/floodplain values of the area.

**Wildlife and Habitat.** The NPS would follow established guidelines in the park's bear-human conflict management plan. The plan requires the park staff (trail crews) or contractors to use bear-proof containers for food and refuse and sets up guidelines for temporary closures.

**Cultural Resources.** Surveys for cultural resources have taken place in the entrance area over the past two decades. If previously unknown cultural resources were located during construction, the project would be halted in the discovery area until cultural resource staff could determine the significance of the finding. Standards for site damage and materiel/information lost would be established to limit damage to the cultural information present at the sites. The NPS will re-map the cultural resources along the McKinley Station Trail west of the Alaska railroad trestle and will present a plan for protection and interpretation of those resources to the State Historic Preservation Officer for approval before construction work on that area of the trail will take place.

**Visitor Use and Recreation.** During trail construction, visitors in the area would be directed to use the new multi-purpose trail or free shuttle bus to connect between the Visitor Center and Riley Creek Campground area.

### **Rationale for the Decision**

Alternative 3 is chosen because it best satisfies the purpose and need for action by providing

additional recreational and interpretive opportunities in the entrance area of Denali, to improve pedestrian and vehicle safety around the visitor center/depot and park airstrip, and to provide access to floodplain resources and historic resources of the park entrance area. New trails are needed in this area because the visitor center will be a much larger focus of visitor activity than was the park hotel, the former main facility at the site. By selecting a Longer McKinley Station Trail, the recreational nature of the trail will be emphasized because the trail will pass through a dynamic riparian environment that presents opportunities for hydrological, geological and plant ecology interpretation. The Longer McKinley Station Trail also provides for accessible trails from both the new Denali Visitor Center and the Riley Creek Campground area to the likely bridge site area on Hines Creek for a future re-route of the Triple Lakes Trail. Alternative 2, though providing a shorter trail between the Visitor Center and the Riley Creek Campground, would provide very little riparian resource experience opportunity and would provide accessible access to a potential bridge site from only the Campground side of the railroad tracks. The No-Action alternative would not follow up on the goal for the entrance area to provide additional constructed recreational and interpretive opportunities.

The selected alternative is consistent with the 1986 Park General Management Plan, National Park Service Management Policies, and the conceptual planning in the 1997 *Entrance Area and Road Corridor Development Concept Plan*.

Adverse impacts such as the clearing of trees on 0.6 acre of white spruce-mixed forest and 0.1 acre of upper riparian zone vegetation will result in a minor adverse impact on vegetation, soils and wetlands; a minor impact on wildlife and visitor use and enjoyment; a beneficial impact on cultural resources; and a beneficial impact on visitor use and enjoyment. These impacts will not result in an impairment of park natural resources fulfilling specific purposes identified in legislation establishing the park or key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park and will not violate the NPS Organic Act.

Although it is the environmentally preferred alternative, the no-action was not selected for implementation because it would not satisfy the purpose and need for the action.

## **Significance Criteria**

Alternative 3 will not have a significant effect on the human environment. This conclusion is based on the following examination of the significance criteria defined in 40 CFR Section 1508.27.

**1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.** Alternative 3 will have no impacts on air resources; natural soundscape; wilderness; threatened, endangered or other special status species; subsistence; park management; local communities and socioeconomic resources; and minority and low income populations. Impacts to vegetation, soils, wetlands, floodplains and wildlife will range from negligible to minor effects. Impacts to cultural resources and visitor use and enjoyment will be beneficial.

**2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** There would be a beneficial impact to public safety if some of the hikers traveling between the Riley Creek Campground area and the Denali Visitor Center area decide to use the new trail rather than cutting across the airstrip and railroad tracks.

**3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetland, wild and scenic rives, or ecologically critical areas.** No known, unique characteristics are located within or near the project area, except for national park lands. Improved access to cultural resource sites is part of the benefit and reason for doing the project.

**4. The degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The EA analysis and public comments do not indicate that any effects presented in the EA are controversial.

**5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The EA analysis and public comments do not indicate that any effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

**6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent of future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision about a future consideration.

**7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.** The proposed action is partially tiered to actions approved in the Record of Decision for the 1997 DCP/EIS for the area and will not act in conjunction with other actions to produce cumulatively significant impacts. The need for a new bridge on a re-routed Triple Lakes Trail is addressed in the 1997 EIS and site alternatives for that re-route and bridge would be evaluated in a future Environmental Assessment.

**8. Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The project would provide opportunities to highlight human history of the area and would have a beneficial effect on expanding the understanding of the benefits of preserving cultural resources and the effects would be consistent with the mandates of the NHPA.

**9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, no known endangered, threatened, special concern or candidate species occur within or near the project area.

**10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** Alternative 3 does not violate any federal, state or local environmental protection laws.

## **FINDINGS**

The levels of adverse impacts to park resources anticipated from the selected alternative will not result in an impairment of park resources that fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or that are key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park.

The selected alternative complies with the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act and Executive Orders 11988 and 11990. There will be no significant restriction of subsistence activities as documented by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Title VIII, Section 810(a) Summary Evaluation and Findings.

The NPS has determined that the selected alternative does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement is not needed and will not be prepared.

**ATTACHMENT A**  
**NPS RESPONSES TO PUBLIC COMMENTS**  
for  
**Two New Trails in the Park Entrance Area**

This attachment to the Environmental Assessment provides National Park Service (NPS) responses to public comments. The NPS received one substantive electronic comment representing the views of a private individual. The NPS also received comments from the State of Alaska and another individual in support of the trail construction without specifying support for a particular action alternative.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**Comment 1, Individual:** The individual stated that the NPS does not have a complete map of cultural resources, including segments of old roadways, can dumps or other traces of structures in the area below the trestle. She states that the resources need to be mapped and the pattern of settlement studied before construction of the McKinley Station Trail so that trail construction and use would not adversely affect those resources. She suggests that wayside signage on the trails should explain the significance of the cultural resource pattern to the trail users and request those users to stay on the trail and respect the cultural resources.

**Response 1, NPS:** The NPS will re-map the cultural resources along the McKinley Station Trail west of the Alaska railroad trestle and will present a plan for protection and interpretation of those resources to the State Historic Preservation Officer for approval before construction work on that area of the trail will take place. This requirement will be added to the mitigation section of the decision document.

**ERRATA**

This errata section usually provides clarifications, modifications or additional information for the EA and for the selected alternative. In this case, however, no changes have been made to the EA, the analysis of the EA is unchanged and, therefore, a new or revised EA will not be produced.